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# Utopia Parkway

by CHARLES L. MEE

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Queens.

A street.

Is there a concrete or brick wall  
in which a big hole has been blown  
so that we see a garden with trees through the hole?

Are there easy chairs around on the sidewalk  
and in the street, or sitting in the dirt,  
so here, outdoors, we have indoor furniture?

Casting note:  
46% of Queens is foreign born.

## 1. The Prologue

A long, slow first scene  
so as to make the second scene  
even more stunning when it comes.

The doctor/apothecary enters quietly  
and begins to set out his herbs  
and other medicines neatly.  
He speaks to us as though to a customer.

DOCTOR

How do bad things happen  
(when most people are so good)?

[he sets out his herbs]

Nobody I know gets out of bed in the morning and says:  
now, today, I am going to do something bad.  
No.

[he sets out his herbs]

The worst a person might say  
sometimes  
is: today  
I may have to choose the lesser of two evils.  
And who can blame us for that?  
This is the human condition.  
Nothing comes without a price  
and so on and so forth as they say.  
We live a balanced life.

[he sets out his herbs]

The good  
is a wonderful thing.  
The generous  
is a wonderful thing.  
The benevolent  
the charitable  
the compassionate  
the tolerant  
these are all things we aspire to  
even though we know  
from day to day  
for the most part  
we must live without them  
because  
we have come to know who we are.

[while he speaks  
a dentist enters  
and begins to set up his dental office on the street  
setting out his instruments etc.]

There was a man who lived here for example  
not so long ago...

[The doctor, as he speaks,  
gestures toward the dentist]

the dentist here knows about this.

DENTIST  
Who is this?

DOCTOR  
Mr. Lee.

DENTIST  
I cut his hair.  
What there was of it.  
I told him:  
you don't want a comb over  
it makes it more obvious than it is.  
You should shave your head.  
Make do with what you have.  
He never listened.

DOCTOR  
He was a scholar, Mr. Lee.

DENTIST  
He never listened.

DOCTOR  
That's what I'm saying.  
In any case,  
his wife died, Mrs. Lee,

and left him with a baby daughter  
whom he felt  
he couldn't raise by himself  
or even at all for that matter

DENTIST  
he had to get on with his career

DOCTOR  
had to get on with his work

[A cook enters,  
begins setting up his grill.]

DENTIST  
the truth is,  
he had to make a living  
this is how it is

COOK  
Some people have to make do.

DENTIST  
Their hand is forced.

COOK  
A person without money  
is like a turtle without a shell.

DOCTOR  
And this was a man  
all he ever wanted to do was to care for his daughter  
This girl he loved, you might say, almost:  
to distraction.

DENTIST  
This is how it is for a parent sometimes  
they love their children more even than themselves

so that  
when they see that they themselves  
stand in the way of a life for their children

COOK  
they let them go

DENTIST  
they give them up

COOK  
to give them a life they never otherwise could have had

DENTIST  
But to give her away  
when she was only seven years old

DOCTOR  
the old man wept and wept

DENTIST  
I saw him weeping

DOCTOR  
In any case, he went to a widow here nearby

[A T-shirt seller enters  
to set up shop.

And others enter from time to time  
and set up their little shops,  
T-shirt stands  
food stands.  
There are people  
with sewing machines

making dresses, cassettes, sneakers  
giving each other haircuts, shaves, massages, acupuncture  
throughout the piece.

The chorus is both a sweat shop and a market place.

And musicians enter  
and set up their instruments—  
including a toy piano—  
and begin to tune up.]

DENTIST

He owed the widow some money....

DOCTOR

and couldn't pay it back  
and so he thought  
he would give his daughter to the widow  
this was heartbreaking for him  
but the girl could help the woman around the house  
cooking, cleaning, whatever the girl could do

DENTIST

and that would settle his debt

DOCTOR

and also  
he was also thinking  
he not only settled his debt  
he got the girl a home  
and he also got her the prospect of a husband

COOK

because of the widow's son living in the house

DOCTOR

Yes, indeed,  
because, naturally, it occurred to the man

that the girl  
living in the same house with this young boy

T-SHIRT SELLER

This is the widow Jones.

DOCTOR

Yes.

T-SHIRT SELLER

Left with some money by her dead husband

COOK

And not only the money he left her  
but after all  
the widow used the money  
to go into the loan business for herself

DOCTOR

Loaning money to those in need.

DENTIST

So that she became famous  
as a person of some means.

COOK

Even infamous you might almost say.

T-SHIRT SELLER

And not only in her own neighborhood.

DOCTOR

In any case  
the man thought  
leaving his daughter with the widow  
and with her son  
who was the widow's heir and so forth  
with this family that was

comparatively speaking  
a family of some wealth  
that the girl would be well provided for

DENTIST

because the truth is  
he wanted to leave his daughter  
with every advantage that he could  
that he himself had never had

DOCTOR

because he loved her that's all  
and she doted on him, too.  
I never knew a girl  
more loving  
more respectful

DENTIST

More vulnerable when it comes to that.

DOCTOR

vulnerable  
and so, as a consequence,  
more compassionate toward others  
knowing all too well, as she did,  
one might say:  
what a struggle it can be  
for people to get from day to day.

DENTIST

Because, you might say, with the world the way it is,  
this is the sort of thing that can happen.

THE COOK

We do what we can.

T-SHIRT SELLER

We shouldn't.



DOCTOR

In any case,  
the girl was raised by the widow

DENTIST

And the father was never heard from again.  
No one knew what had become of him  
until the news came that he had died.

COOK

A sad thing.

DOCTOR

And then, when the girl was thirteen,  
she married the widow's son

DENTIST

Which was the most amazing thing of all.  
That he married her at all!

COOK

How he might have behaved instead  
with a girl in the house  
no one really to defend her

DOCTOR

And then, as it turned out,  
the girl liked the boy.

T-SHIRT SELLER

The turns a life can take!

THE COOK

They got on very well.

DOCTOR

I won't say how well.  
I won't say it was a love match.  
It was a marriage of friendship and loyalty

and mutual regard—  
finally, whatever else it may have been—  
the boy, I gather, hadn't had too easy a time of it himself  
being in some way  
impaired  
I don't know how to say just how.

THE COOK

No one knows these things from the outside.

T SHIRT SELLER

Just what sort of relationship they had had.

THE COOK

Whether it might even have been....

T SHIRT SELLER

Intimate.

THE COOK

Intimate.

DOCTOR

In any case,  
before two years had passed  
after the wedding of the young girl and the boy  
the son had died  
the girl herself was a widow at fifteen  
still a girl and already a widow  
and she was left living with the old woman  
who,  
by this time,  
the girl had come to think of as her own mother  
and she had come to treat the old widow with all the respect  
and devotion  
one could ever wish from a daughter.

DENTIST

Amazing.

THE COOK

A model person.

Of course, to be sure,

when you look more closely

you are likely to find a flaw or two

in any human being

but with this girl

it seemed to those of us who were merely neighbors

that she was as close to flawless

as a human being can get.

Through all this she remained as sweet as any girl could ever be.

As sweet as marzipan she was.

DENTIST

And beautiful.

DOCTOR

I'm not sure it would be appropriate

for an older man to comment....

COOK

Lovely.

T-SHIRT SELLER

I would even say ravishing.

DOCTOR

She had grown up to be radiant.

[The band plays.]

## **2. The Girl**

[And the girl enters

a ravishing entrance

and sings.

It may be that she lip syncs her songs,  
and that many of the songs throughout the piece  
are done as karaoke.]

THE GIRL [singing]

When I wake up in the morning  
and think of what's to come  
I can't believe  
that I'm so lucky  
to be alive another day

to come out on the sidewalk  
and see the passersby  
these fine young men  
and lovely women  
each going their own way  
so full of life and energy  
it seems to me a miracle  
a thousand thousand people  
with their thousand thousand thoughts  
how is it even possible  
with all their different plans  
that they can get along at all  
and even more than that  
sometimes  
take pleasure in each other  
help each other out  
look out for one another  
extend their hearts to someone else  
put another's wishes  
ahead of their very own  
and end the day each day  
some of them  
in one another's arms?  
It seems to me a miracle  
and such a lovely one  
it's this that wakes me every day

with such happiness for what's ahead  
such hope for what the day may hold  
such love of life on earth.

When I wake up in the morning  
and think of what's to come  
I can't believe  
that I'm so lucky  
to live another day.

[The chorus—or the entire cast?—sings with her:

When I wake up in the morning  
and think of what's to come  
I can't believe  
that I'm so lucky  
to live another day.

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

I'm so lucky

to live another day

[and then she leaves  
as everyone looks after her  
mouths agape]

### **3. The Proposal**

THE BOY

In fact,  
I'll marry the girl  
or I'm not a man.

THE WIDOW

The girl  
The girl doesn't want to be married.

THE BOY

Doesn't want.  
Doesn't want.  
How old is she?  
She doesn't know what she doesn't want.

WIDOW

She knows she doesn't want to be married.

THE BOY

Excuse me.  
Are you the woman  
my father and I just found in the alley on the other side of town  
being strangled to death  
by a dissatisfied customer

OLD MAN

someone to whom you had loaned some money

THE BOY

and he couldn't pay it back

WIDOW

And I thanked you for that.  
Did I not thank you for that?

THE BOY

So now  
my father's plan:  
to make certain you never find yourself  
in such trouble again  
my father will take you as his wife.

THE WIDOW

His what?

THE BOY

In order to keep you safe in the future  
my father is going to marry you  
and I will marry your daughter-in-law.

THE WIDOW

Marry my daughter-in-law!  
Oh, I don't think so.  
Goodness me.  
I am grateful to you  
as I have said.  
But marriage, no.  
I am a widow of twenty years  
my daughter-in-law is a widow, too,  
respectable women.  
Still,  
if you will give me a chance to get back home  
where I keep my things  
I will see to it that you are very well rewarded  
for what you've done for me.

THE BOY

Well rewarded?  
With some little sum of money  
some little little tip?

I don't think so.

Just because we are a couple of men  
who happen to be passing through town  
don't think we are going to be easy  
to get rid of with some insignificant gratuity.

No.

We know who you are.

We know what you have.

My father will marry you,  
and I will marry your daughter-in-law.

Because

we saved your life.

#### THE WIDOW

I've never heard of such a thing.

What do you think:

this is Uzbekistan?

Women don't marry men

just because

just because they

found them in an alley someplace.

#### THE BOY

I see.

Your gratitude goes only so far.

But look at the position you are in.

There you were

wandering around a neighborhood

where, for a woman like you to be alone

is asking to be mugged and murdered.

Do you think that fellow was the only desperate person  
in the neighborhood?

Well,

but if that means nothing to you

then never mind

we'll take you back and leave you where we found you  
if you think you can get out alive.



THE WIDOW

But

I don't know where I was.

THE BOY

Yes. Well.

There you are, then.

THE WIDOW

But if you will let me take you home

let me give you a good meal

and something to drink

and a handsome sum of money to send you on your way.

THE BOY

Widow Jones,

if I may call you that,

because

I know who you are,

we have been honest with you.

And you should give us the respect we deserve

and be plaindealing with us in return.

Without us you'd be dead.

You'd have nothing.

And we're not asking you for everything.

We're only asking for our half.

Don't think you can

fob us off with some little bribe

give us the slip

and send us on our way.

We know where to find you

we can always bring you back out where you were

and dump you there again.

We're offering you a perfectly respectable proposal  
of marriage.

OLD MAN [soothingly]

A woman like yourself  
well-to-do

what will happen to your money if you die

you have no children

you have the girl

you will leave your money to her

and then what?

Let's be honest.

She's a defenseless child.

What does she know of money or of business

or of unscrupulous people as far as that's concerned?

You don't want her to go unprotected.

Whereas my son

has gone to college.

THE WIDOW

Is he a graduate?

OLD MAN

Yes, indeed, he is.

I had the sense to put my money where it would do most good.

Because, after all, this is my future

and yours, too,

and also the girl's, as far as that's concerned.

Here's a boy who's been brought up to know

how to keep hold of what he's got.

How to play it safe,

when to take a risk,

how to hedge a bet

when to cut and run

when to put all his eggs in one basket

and watch that basket!

This is not the sort of thing you can learn very easily

if you haven't gone to college.

And the friends he's made.

A whole network.  
I've helped him out myself  
with the contacts that I've had  
from over the years, the things I've done.  
I'm not saying the whole world's corrupt  
no, indeed,  
quite the contrary  
that's just the point!  
You never know who you can trust.  
But if you have some friends and you know your friends  
you can be sure you won't run afoul  
of the wrong sort of person.

And investment advice:  
that's not the boy's only area of expertise  
but protection, you know,  
of the most basic sort  
keeping your girl from people who might wish her harm  
violent people  
as well as connivers  
people who might cause her physical damage  
having the sense to know:  
if some other fellow is a threat or not  
and if he is  
to strike him first  
take him out  
before he's had a chance to make a move.  
We could be your partners.  
That could be good for you  
when you think what sort of people we are.

So you can leave your worries in my boy's hands  
and sleep soundly every night  
knowing that's all taken care of.  
Because that's what I've raised the boy to do.

And how about yourself?  
You've been a hard-working person, I know.  
Going to bed every night

plagued by worry.  
Maybe you'd like to have someone relieve you  
of some of the strain of business.

You've been a widow now—  
for how long?

THE WIDOW  
Twenty years.

OLD MAN  
And let's be honest  
I am a widower myself  
and I can't say that I enjoy going to bed alone  
all these years  
sleeping by myself.  
They've done studies  
I'm sure you've heard  
of people living in retirement homes  
and it turns out  
they have very active sex lives.  
But how about you?

THE WIDOW  
Well....

OLD MAN  
Of course, you've been as lonely as I have.  
And it's so unnecessary!  
You're an attractive woman,  
may I say, a very attractive woman.  
And I myself  
some people say  
am not an altogether repulsive specimen!  
My family may have fallen on hard times,  
but I do not come without a certain lineage  
a certain social position  
that frankly  
I can bring to you.

Along with  
let's be honest  
a warm and open heart  
a romantic nature  
a longing  
just as sure as I know you have yourself  
for a real partnership  
and a lasting love  
with someone who doesn't just look on you as a friend  
or companion for the later years of life  
but someone who still believes  
in passion  
and fun  
good times  
and hot sex.

THE WIDOW

Oh.

I see.

OLD MAN

I know.

[sings]

You get a kick from champagne.

WIDOW

Well...

OLD MAN [sings]

You get a buzz from Biarritz.

WIDOW

I don't know...

OLD MAN [sings]

You like a guy with a certain

could be

knowledge of just how to please.

WIDOW

Oh.

OLD MAN [sings]

And that kind of guy could be me.

WIDOW [sings]

It's true:

I get a kick from champagne.

OLD MAN

I knew.

WIDOW [sings]

I get a buzz from Biarritz.

OLD MAN

C'est vous.

WIDOW [sings]

I like a guy with a certain

could be

knowledge of just how to please.

OLD MAN

Yes.

WIDOW [sings]

And that kind of guy could be you.

OLD MAN AND WIDOW [sing together]

I had a hunch when we met

You could be just my own sort

I've had a need for quite a long time

for someone who has what you've got

And you could have just what I lack.

OLD MAN [sings]

I've looked a long time for you

WIDOW [sings]

I've been alone for so long

OLD MAN [sings]

I need a woman

who has her own job

WIDOW [sings]

I need a man with an edge

OLD MAN AND WIDOW [sing together]

I had a hunch when we met

You could be just my own sort

I've had a need for quite a long time

for someone who has what you've got

And you could have just what I lack.

[The Widow and the Old Man

dance together.]

OLD MAN

Why don't you give my boy a chance?

THE WIDOW

I'm sorry?

THE BOY

I say, why don't you put my boy to the test?

See if he can be of help to you.

For instance,

try him with a math problem.

THE WIDOW

Oh.

I see.

Well,  
what is \$15 times 200%  
compounded every other week?

THE BOY

I don't think I'll be settling for 200%.

THE WIDOW

Come with me.

I'll show you where I live.

#### **4. Street talk**

The chorus sings:

When you're walking down the street at night  
you see something that you like  
you reach out and you take it  
before you find it's gone

You take it  
and you drive it  
you drink it  
or you eat it  
you wear it  
or you fuck it  
because you know that if you don't  
some other guy will get it

There was a kid  
I knew one time  
he lit a bum on fire  
poured gasoline all over him  
and lit him with a match  
watched the flames light up the night  
it was a lovely sight  
the crowd that gathered  
they were surprised



some said they were amazed  
they said in all their lives  
they'd never seen a thing like this  
a man just lit on fire  
and burning through the night  
the kid I knew  
he turned to them  
and said:  
where have you been?  
where I come from  
this happens all the time  
we do it every night  
we do it in the cold weather  
because we need the heat  
we do it in the summer  
because we like the light  
sometimes we do it  
at midday  
because it feels so good  
to us this isn't an exception  
to us it is the rule

— while the boy does a braggadocio performance piece,  
showing off his skills  
with a lacrosse stick  
or a golf club  
from the garbage can

and several others from the chorus join him  
doing the same thing  
with tennis rackets and hacky sacks from the trash bin  
while the music continues.

## 5. Mother Breaks the News

The Widow, accompanied by the old man and his son,  
finds the girl on the street.

THE GIRL

Mother, you're back.  
Have you eaten?

THE WIDOW

Child, how can I tell you?

THE GIRL

Tell me what?

Who are these men?

THE WIDOW

These men saved my life.

THE GIRL

Saved your life?  
Mother, what happened?

THE WIDOW

I went to see old Iserson  
to collect the debt he owed  
and he took me out into an alley  
with the idea, it seems,  
he would murder me  
so he wouldn't have to pay his debt  
and then along came this man and his son  
who saved my life.

THE GIRL

Oh, thank you, thank you.  
How can we ever thank you enough?  
Let me give you a cup of tea  
or something for you to eat.

OLD MAN

Thank you.

In fact, your mother has been very kind.

She offered us a place to stay.

THE GIRL

She has?

Where?

THE WIDOW

With us.

THE GIRL

With us?

THE WIDOW

The truth is

this gentleman has proposed marriage to me.

THE GIRL

Marriage?

OLD MAN

I have.

THE GIRL

How could you be married?

A widow of twenty years.

THE WIDOW

Many older women are marrying these days.

THE GIRL

Are what?

THE WIDOW

You know, just because a woman has attained a certain age  
doesn't mean she is no longer desirable  
or interested in marriage.

THE GIRL

Yes, yes, of course.

I didn't mean to say...

[to the OLD MAN]

I mean, of course, my mother is an attractive woman  
and will be, I'm sure  
till the end of her days.

[to THE WIDOW]

I only meant to say  
it may be that other women feel they need to marry  
they often do  
that's the predicament they find themselves in.  
But, luckily, your husband provided for you before he died.  
So you have the chance to spend your later years in comfort  
beholden to no one  
to do everything just as you please  
not have to answer to anyone  
be an independent person  
what everyone hopes for all their lives  
and this is what you have  
I think this is what your husband wanted  
to leave you in a position  
that you wouldn't ever have to be at the mercy  
of people like these.

OLD MAN

Like these?

THE WIDOW

Still

many older women feel  
their lives have not come to an end  
just because they are widows.

OLD MAN

Many older women find  
that age is a different sort of thing these days  
just because you are over the age of 30  
doesn't mean you never again think of love  
or sex.

THE BOY

Just because a person is no longer a subscriber to  
Teen Magazine  
or Cosmo  
doesn't mean she doesn't want to have a full life.

THE GIRL

Of course, of course.  
Still. Whatever.  
A woman doesn't want to marry just any man who comes along.

THE WIDOW

Sometimes in life  
you have to understand  
this is the hand that I've been dealt  
now I'll play it the best I can.

OLD MAN [smiling, charming]

And maybe this is not the worst that could happen  
when you've lived as long as your mother and I have  
you'll see  
that other people have to put up with worse than this  
every day.

THE WIDOW

Sometimes  
you have to take life as it comes.  
And here is a man  
I have to say  
who has a certain charm  
a certain worldliness  
that is not altogether unappealing.

THE GIRL

A man finds you in distress,  
saves you  
and says you have to marry him  
or he will leave you there to die  
and you think this is an appealing man?

THE BOY

And don't forget  
he has a son!

THE GIRL

A son, yes! A son!  
And this is a good thing????????

[the girl runs out in confusion;

the mother yells after her]

THE WIDOW

What are you saying to me?  
You mean to say  
a woman should never marry again  
even if her husband has been dead for twenty years?

[the girl returns]

THE GIRL

Shouldn't marry any man who comes along  
without a moment's notice  
drop everything and think  
all of a sudden  
oh  
I think I'll marry him  
whoever he might be  
even if he is a felon and a godknows what

#### THE WIDOW

I'm not a person who has made my way in life  
entertaining romantic fantasies  
of how my life could be  
when I can see how things are.  
I've had to deal in the facts  
and when I see how things are in fact  
I act accordingly  
without wasting any time.

[The Widow storms out]

#### THE GIRL

Mother!  
Don't leave me like this.  
We can talk.  
We can come to some understanding!

[The Widow returns.]

#### THE WIDOW

Easy for you to say,  
woman of leisure that you have become  
nothing threatening your survival  
you can sit back and theorize all day long  
about the way things can be  
in a hundred years or two.  
But for those of us who live on the margins  
without some cushion against the harshness of the world  
we have to see life as it is  
and make the best of it.  
And let's be honest  
getting by for twenty years on my own  
I'm getting a little worn out  
maybe I could use someone to run the business for me  
and let me finally stay at home  
and think about  
caring for my grandchildren.

[The widow leaves.  
And the girl sings.]

THE GIRL [singing]  
What is love?  
I thought I knew  
but it was not like this  
the love I thought a woman finds  
was absolutely bliss

I had in mind  
some tenderness  
some mutual regard  
some caring and some fondness  
it shouldn't be so hard

to find a guy  
who likes someone  
for everything she is  
who treasures her and gives to her  
everything that's his

who makes her think  
he's like my dad  
but even more than that  
he's like my mom as well  
he cares for me  
and keeps me safe  
he puts me first in every way  
he thinks of all my needs  
he gives me everything I want  
he treats me like a queen

What is love?  
I thought I knew  
but it was not like this  
the love I thought a woman finds  
was absolutely bliss



## 6. Wedding Plans

[The Widow comes back  
her wedding dress half on  
her veil in her hand—  
and everyone,  
including the girl,  
helps her get dressed  
as they talk.]

THE WIDOW

Child, let me explain.

THE GIRL [not assaulting her mother but just confused and undone]

Mother, what could you explain?

I can't think how it is you would be married.

And how would the wedding be itself?

I don't think I know.

THE COOK

Would you have a country-themed wedding?

White picket fences, fields of wild flowers,

freshly baled haystacks?

a neighborhood get-together around the grill?

T-SHIRT SELLER

a flower-covered arch for an entrance to the wedding?

honeysuckle vines or floral garlands

hanging from the ceiling

lanterns hanging from trees

THE GIRL

[she is undone by this overwhelming avalanche of fears]

To me, it seems a nightmare

THE DENTIST

Or would you rather have a nautical theme?

#### THE COOK

Decorate your wedding cake  
with chocolates made like seashells.  
Serve foods that remind your guests  
of a trip to the beach:  
crab dip and lobster.

#### DENTIST

Hire a DJ or band  
that specializes in beach music.  
Like Jimmy Buffett, or The Beach Boys.  
Think of tunes like "Under the Boardwalk"  
or "I love Beach Music".

#### T-SHIRT SELLER

What is it that they say?  
To ensure good luck,  
should the bride step  
with her right foot first into the church?

#### ANOTHER

What would you have on the top of the cake?

#### ANOTHER

the traditional bride and groom?

#### ANOTHER

a deep lavender heart  
adorned with daisies in shades of lavender?

#### THE WIDOW

There's so much to decide

#### ANOTHER

Or you could do the golfer's wedding  
and cut Astro Turf into little rounds  
to turn each table into a different hole  
from your favorite golf courses

ANOTHER

and make the long head table a fairway

ANOTHER

turn the waters' service wagons into golf carts

ANOTHER

and dress the staff in plaid caps to resemble caddies

ANOTHER

create a wedding cake  
that looks like a complete golf course  
with everything  
from a sand trap to a pond

ANOTHER

a miniature bride and groom on top of the cake  
dressed in their golf attire

THE DENTIST

Will there be a bachelorette party?  
And everyone will play Scavenger Hunt?  
And look for what?

ANOTHER

A business card.

ANOTHER

A chest hair.

ANOTHER

A condom.

ANOTHER

A pair of boxers.

ANOTHER

Or you could do the thing  
where you get a t-shirt and put life savers all over it

that spell out the words  
"A Buck a Suck"  
and every guy who sucks a life saver off your shirt  
has to give you a dollar

ANOTHER

And you can decorate the party room  
with helium-inflated condoms

ANOTHER

and each of the guests gets a banana  
or a cucumber  
and has to carve a penis out of it  
with her teeth

THE GIRL

This is not something a woman should be doing  
at your age.

THE WIDOW

Don't you think?

THE GIRL

I don't think even I can carve a penis with my teeth.

[The old man  
already dressed in his tuxedo  
steps into the middle of the wedding hubbub  
and sings  
and the chorus backs him up  
with humming  
and taking a few bars from time to time.]

OLD MAN [sings]

I always knew the day would come  
when wedding bells would ring  
I'd wear a white carnation  
and hear the register ka-ching

The bride would have her dowry  
and I would have my thing  
she'd come to me with her trousseau  
my heart would go ka-ching

I'd settle down in my old age  
to see what life would bring  
when I lived at last on easy street  
and the world would go ka-ching

I never thought I'd see the day  
all I want to do is sing  
my feet are up, I'm kicking back  
my whole life goes ka-ching

## **7. From Bad to Worse**

[The Widow is now dressed in full regalia.]

THE WIDOW [SINGS]

Who knew  
at my age, too  
I could fall in love like this  
I could have such a feeling  
like a week in Darjeeling  
who knew

Who knew  
I'd ever find  
a fellow such as you  
and even better yet  
like no one would have bet  
I'd make you happy, too

Who knew  
you live this long  
and still you find

what every man and woman wants  
it's like a lifetime in Provence  
who knew

THE GIRL

Oh, mother,  
look at you.  
I always thought  
things can't get worse  
but now I see they will  
if there's any way they can.

THE WIDOW

I understand you may think  
I'm too old for this sort of thing.  
But perhaps you're not yourself.

THE GIRL

Not myself for what?

THE WIDOW

Not yourself too old for marriage.

You see I have a gown for you, too.

THE GIRL

A gown?  
I'm not getting married, too,  
if that's what you mean.

THE WIDOW

A woman needs to be realistic  
even more, probably, than a man.

THE GIRL

Who would I marry?

THE WIDOW

The young man who saved my life with the help of his father  
he can take care of you  
long after I am gone.  
He promised me he would.

THE GIRL

Promised you?

THE WIDOW

Yes.

THE GIRL

You mean he said he would marry me?

THE WIDOW

Yes.

THE GIRL

And you  
and you  
and you listened to him?  
Are you saying you promised me to him?  
You talked to him about marrying me?  
And you didn't tell me?

THE WIDOW

They said they would leave me there to die  
unless we both promised to marry them.

THE GIRL

Both marry them?  
Both marry them?  
You promised we would both marry them?  
No one ever heard of such a thing.  
Here it goes from bad to worse.  
What have I done wrong?  
Can it be that in my previous life  
I did not burn enough incense?

Haven't I been a faithful daughter  
haven't I cared for you all these years  
put your wishes ahead always of my own  
consoled you when your only son died  
stuck up for you with your friends  
and now  
you hand me away  
the moment some guy comes along?  
Now what could I ever believe again  
about anything at all?

[She collapses to the ground.]

Now the boy enters,  
he, too,  
already in his wedding tux,  
and he sings his love song.]

THE BOY [sings]  
I'm following in your footsteps, dad,  
just like you said I'd do  
I'm getting into someone's pants  
and she's got some money, too

I always knew that you were right  
that what you said was true  
you have to follow your own bliss  
and she's got some money, too

I know as I was growing up  
I questioned a rule or two  
but I'm old enough to know better now  
and she's got some money, too

You always said there were two kinds  
the old rich and the new  
I'm getting married now, dad,  
and she's got some money, too



## 8. Martial Arts

[And now the girl turns on the chorus  
and berates them for not helping her.]

THE GIRL

Where is everyone when I need them?  
All the things I've done for you  
you've been happy when I've brought you tea  
a warm meal in the winter  
asked about your mothers when they were ill  
taken soup to them  
and now  
where are you?  
I'm going to be given to a guy  
whether I want him or not?  
And no one helps me out?  
Do you understand that this is rape?  
And you are all bystanders?

T-SHIRT SELLER

Well, I wouldn't say  
"bystander" — exactly.

ANOTHER

We're here for you.

ANOTHER

Giving you our support.

ANOTHER

Speaking up  
when spoken to.

ANOTHER

Because, after all,  
what could we do?

ANOTHER

You have to learn  
to stay out of other people's business.

ANOTHER

Other people have their own agendas  
you never know.

ANOTHER

They could have other values  
you'd just be interfering  
with a perfectly valid different point of view.

ANOTHER

There was a time  
we always knew  
what it was we had to do  
everyone agreed  
we all knew what was true  
and what it was we had to do  
but now we have the questions still  
and no one has the answers

THE GIRL

I've been abandoned by my father  
my mother steps aside  
my friends and neighbors all pretend  
it's got nothing to do with them  
now who will keep me safe?

THE BOY

That's why I'm here for you.

THE GIRL [singing]

All my life  
I've waited all my life  
to meet someone  
that I would love  
and all my life

I've waited all my life  
to meet someone  
who'd love me, too.

THE BOY [sings in reply]  
All my life  
I've waited all my life  
to meet someone  
that I could have  
and all my life  
I've waited all my life  
to meet someone  
who'd have me, too.

THE GIRL [singing]  
I always thought  
I'd find one day  
some perfect guy  
to come my way.  
Not tall perhaps  
not dark and handsome  
but with a soul  
and real compassion.

THE BOY [sings in reply]  
I always thought  
I'd find one day  
some hot young girl  
to come my way.  
A blonde perhaps  
who likes some action  
not afraid of guys  
with some real passion.

THE GIRL [singing]  
I've looked for him  
looked everywhere  
looked for him  
someone to care

an honest guy  
and faithful, too  
just simple love  
just love that's true

THE BOY [sings with the girl but slightly different lyrics]

I've looked for her  
looked everywhere  
looked for her  
someone to share  
some lip and thigh  
and buttock, too  
just simple sex  
that's what would do

THE GIRL [singing]

He could be anyone  
or anything  
if he'd be sweet  
I'd wear his ring.  
If he'd be good  
and think of me  
I'd give myself  
to him entirely.

THE BOY [sings with the girl but slightly different lyrics]

She could be anyone  
or anything  
if she's sweet on me  
I'd be the king  
I'd be so good  
the guys would see  
she'd give herself  
to me entirely.

THE GIRL

I look at you,  
and I think:

What do I know about you  
except that you move from town to town  
living off the land?

THE BOY

Some would look  
and they would think  
now here's a clever person  
who has everything it takes  
to make his way out in the world  
Not a person  
let's be honest  
a person quite like you  
a layabout, a passive girl  
taken care of by her mother  
a girl who can't defend herself  
even afraid to go out on her own

THE GIRL

But not a bully like you  
not a person who takes everything  
that isn't nailed down  
and claims it for his own

THE BOY

Not a sponger just like you

THE GIRL

Not a bloodsucker like you

THE BOY

Not a dead weight  
not a whiner  
not a loser  
not a skinny, skanky girl like you

THE GIRL

Not a jerk  
not an anus

not a nincompoop like you  
Not a greasy dickwad  
not a foul-mouthed fart like you

#### THE BOY

not a nasty little malcontent  
not a bitch, not a slut  
not a nit picker like you

#### THE GIRL

So this is how you court a girl?  
This is your case for marriage?  
Who would want a guy like you  
except to take out all the trash?

#### THE BOY

And who would want a girl like you  
except to scrub the floor  
and burn the food?

#### THE GIRL

You're a shifty little dimwit  
skulking in the alleys  
stealing from the blind and poor  
What makes you think  
we have what it takes for marriage?

#### THE BOY

What makes me think it?  
I'll tell you what:  
I think I'll have you  
that's what I think  
I'll have you and I'll have you  
and then I'll have you yet again  
as often as I please  
that's what I think  
and that's the way it's going to be  
for me, and for you, too.

[He reaches out to grab her by the arm.  
She breaks his grip.  
He reaches out again.  
She breaks his grip again.  
He grabs her  
and she throws him to the ground.

#### CHORUS

[shouts]

#### THE BOY

Now I think you'll regret  
you got lucky once.  
Now I'll show you what it is to be a man.

[He goes for her.  
She throws him to the ground.  
She grabs him,  
picks him up,  
and throws him to the ground.

The chorus goes crazy with shouting and jumping up and down.

He comes back at her  
and she throws him to the ground.

Now someone in the chorus  
shoves another member of the chorus  
in general enthusiastic embrace  
of the physicality of the day.

The one who is shoved  
shoves back.  
Another shoves.

And so forth.

Until the whole chorus is throwing one another to the ground  
in imitation of the girl

each kicks the shit out of someone else  
coming from the ceiling and down the walls

and SHE,  
SHE KICKS THE SHIT OUT OF THE BOY  
LEAVING HIM SPRAWLED ON THE GROUND  
AND EXITS

so that  
by the end  
the whole stage is littered with beaten up guys

## **9. The Reversal**

WIDOW  
Oh.  
Now I don't feel so well.

OLD MAN  
You don't?

WIDOW  
It could be my stomach  
or my heart.  
I have a pain  
this is nothing like I've ever felt before.

Maybe the young people shouldn't get married after all.

THE BOY  
Not get married?  
The invitations have all gone out.



WIDOW

Still, this could be an omen.

THE BOY

What is this?

Some ruse to renegotiate?

OLD WOMAN

Certainly not.

THE BOY

What the hell is going on?

OLD MAN

It must be indigestion.

THE BOY

Indigestion, right.

I'll go to the doctor  
and get some medicine.

## **10. The Poison**

The doctor "re-introduces" himself with this song:

DOCTOR [sings]

I have a curative for your headache  
a restorative for your back  
I have a purgative for your worry  
Relax: I have a knack.

If you have a contagionis  
and you're feeling a little nequissimus  
or insomnia has you infimus  
and your heart goes palpitat  
if you're suffering from anxietas

you have a dolor in your assinus  
don't go getting in a swivet 'cause  
I've got something just for that.

I have a curative for your headache  
a restorative for your back  
I have a purgative for your worry  
Relax: I'm not a quack.

THE BOY  
To speak plainly,  
I'll be wanting to buy some poison.

DOCTOR  
Poison?  
Whatever for?

THE BOY  
I don't know that it's any of your business.

DOCTOR  
You just made it my business, didn't you?

THE BOY  
Sometimes you find you have some vermin  
messing with your life.

DOCTOR  
My calling is to heal.

THE BOY  
And that's what I'm asking for.  
I'm engaged to be married  
to a beautiful young girl.  
But I find there's an obstacle in my way.

DOCTOR  
Someone keeps her from you?

THE BOY

I'm not someone who deals in gossip.

DOCTOR

Her mother?

THE BOY

That's not for me to say.

DOCTOR

And if her mother were not around  
there'd be no one to protect the girl?

THE BOY

I don't deal in speculation.

DOCTOR

Nonetheless,  
under the circumstances  
I don't think I'm going to be selling you any poison  
I don't think I'll be wanting that on my conscience

THE BOY

I don't see what your conscience has to do with it  
You know you're not responsible  
for what I do with this poison.  
If a person had always to worry  
can I sell this guy a car  
will he use this car in a bank robbery?  
will he use this set of golf clubs to bribe a politician  
the world would come to a standstill  
Your job is to sell a good product if you can  
and leave the rest to the government regulatory agencies.

DOCTOR

How much do you want?

THE BOY

How much will kill a rat?

DOCTOR

How big is the rat?

THE BOY

I'd say 107 pounds.

DOCTOR

That's \$2.95.

THE BOY

OK.

I'll take it.

### **11. The Widow's Soup**

OLD MAN

Old woman, how do you feel?

THE WIDOW

I don't feel good at all.

OLD MAN

Is there anything you'd like to eat?

THE WIDOW

I'd like to have some lamb-tripe soup

OLD MAN

Child, your mother wants some soup.

Hurry it along.

[The girl makes soup  
and, while she does,  
she speaks or sings.]

THE GIRL [singing]

I wonder how it is  
things turned out this way

when I was six or eight years old  
I never thought this could be  
I thought  
in spite of everything  
my life would be a long bright day  
I wonder whether it can be  
does any child know  
the turns a life can take  
that what starts out to be a blessing  
is finally meant to break your heart.

## **12. Taking the Soup**

THE GIRL  
Mother, here is the soup.

THE BOY  
Let me take it to her.  
Wait.  
It needs more salt.

THE GIRL  
Here is salt.

THE BOY  
You put some in.

OLD MAN  
Son, is the soup ready?

THE BOY  
Here it is. You take it to her.

OLD MAN  
Woman, have some soup.  
Let me help you.

THE WIDOW

I can't eat it.

You can have it.

OLD MAN

So, already we are sharing soup.

This is a good omen for a marriage.

You and I,

I think,

are going to come to care for one another

as we never have before

this is my prediction

and I've never yet been wrong

about a woman.

The way you feel for me

I think

it's the next thing to tenderness

and the way I feel for you

it is tenderness already.

[And, while the old man sits by the widow

and eats the soup,

the widow and the old man

sing a duet:

WIDOW AND OLD MAN [singing duet]

What does anyone ever wish for

except enduring love

we look for it all our lives

it's always beyond our grasp

sometimes we give up hope

and then

to our complete surprise we find

it can come at any age

we're so used to living in the cold

we can't believe it's true

and then we find

if we just let go  
and trust this other person  
then we slip right into joy

I've never known such happiness  
such heaven here on earth  
to finally have  
what all my life  
I've yearned and yearned and yearned for  
and now the only thing I hope  
is that it never ends

[The Old Man dies  
while he is singing the song.]

THE BOY  
He's dead!  
You've poisoned my father.

THE GIRL  
I did not.

THE BOY  
Everyone knows you did.

THE WIDOW  
My girl would never do that.  
It must have been a heart attack.

THE BOY  
Poison is what it was.  
And you know the price for murder.  
But I'm prepared to keep it quiet  
if you know what I mean.

THE WIDOW  
I don't.

THE BOY

Keep it in the family, as it were.  
If the girl marries me  
we can call it a heart attack.

THE GIRL

I'll never marry you.

THE BOY

Then there will have to be an autopsy.  
What is it to be?  
Shall we settle this privately  
or do you want to make it public?

THE WIDOW

We'll take it to the authorities.

THE BOY

And who are they going to believe?  
The man's own son  
or two desperate women  
that frankly  
everybody hates  
after all the years  
you've gouged these people with your loans.

THE WIDOW

How can you be sure he's dead?

THE BOY

You can always tell  
if his breath doesn't cloud a mirror  
or  
if that proves inconclusive  
then you can stick a needle in him  
and if the needle becomes oxidized  
then he's alive  
or if  
a few hours after he has died



you cut an artery  
and he bleeds  
he is alive  
or if the body fails to take on the temperature of the room  
twenty-four hours after death  
then he is alive  
but I can assure you  
I know about these things,  
and he is dead.

[The chorus gathers around  
as though at a funeral service.  
Note: these texts are inscriptions  
from tombstones in New England graveyards.]

#### T-SHIRT SELLER

On fame's eternal camping ground  
His silent tent is spread  
And glory guards with solemn rounds  
The bivouac of the dead.

#### ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Soon ripe  
soon rotten  
soon gone  
but not forgotten.

#### ANOTHER

My life's been hard  
and all things show it  
I always thought so  
and now I know it.

#### ANOTHER

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust  
If the Lord doesn't get you  
the devil must.

ANOTHER

Bury me not when I am dead  
Lay me not down in a dusty bed  
I could not bear the life down there  
With earth worms creeping through my hair.

ANOTHER

Come view my tomb, as you pass by,  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, soon you must be,  
therefore prepare to follow me.

[And, as the chorus finishes,  
the judge enters.]

### **13. The Trial**

THE GIRL

You have no evidence.

THE JUDGE

It's true  
ordinarily that would be an impediment  
to conducting a fair trial  
and yet we have a corpse  
and this corpse it seems safe to say  
did not poison itself  
so one must ask:  
how did this come about?

THE WIDOW

And does my daughter not have a right  
to a jury trial?

THE JUDGE

[gesturing toward the chorus]  
This is the jury.

[and, to the girl:]  
And I have to say,  
a confession would simplify matters enormously.

THE GIRL

I won't confess to something I didn't do.

THE JUDGE

Ordinarily of course  
I wouldn't countenance torture  
the whole point of the 5th amendment, after all,  
is to make certain that no one is ever tortured  
since, if a person cannot be forced to testify against themselves  
there's simply no point to torture  
and this, we have to say,  
however much the reputation of the founding fathers  
has been battered over the years  
was a brilliant stratagem on their part

although even so, sometimes we find it is beneficial to use torture  
usually not at home  
but more often abroad  
and sometimes  
you'll hear that at a police station in the Bronx  
or Brooklyn, too,  
that these techniques have been used to good effect  
such things as:

A person can be shocked of course  
with electrodes placed on the body  
blindfolded and put inside a coffin  
which is then rolled down a hill  
hung upside down by the feet  
inside a well  
eardrums pierced  
kicked and punched  
hair grabbed  
the head flung repeatedly  
against the wall

a Mexican song  
played over and over again  
at full volume  
that alone  
while being kicked in the stomach  
on the buttocks and in the groin  
kneeling  
standing  
naked in the courtyard  
baseball bats  
injections of sodium pentathol  
haloperidol and whatnot  
held down in the water  
fed human flesh  
arms and legs broken  
eyes burned out with cigarettes  
lie down, lie down you're told  
and anything could happen  
your right hand ends up in shreds  
you've lost an ear  
and so forth and so on

And these are the sorts of things  
we will do to your mother  
if you won't confess.

THE GIRL

No.

If that's the way it is  
then I confess.

THE JUDGE

Unhappily,  
given your confession,  
you leave me no choice  
but to require your execution.

#### THE WIDOW

Oh, dear,  
you were a good girl  
took good care of me  
for all these years  
did all my bidding  
cared for my son  
always put me first  
and what is it I've done now  
in return

Now I will never be able  
to give you anything in return  
for all you've done for me.

#### THE GIRL

Oh, Mother  
I can't keep myself from cursing the world now as I leave it

how could this happen  
to a girl  
who never brought harm to anyone?  
who always wished  
to give all she had to others

It is more than unjust  
it is needless  
it is cruel beyond all measure  
such maliciousness upsets all order  
now you will see  
the universe itself  
cannot help but bear witness  
to the dreadful wrongs that you accept  
as though they were the normal course of things  
now you will see  
the moment that I die  
even though this is the sweet summer month of June  
if what I say is true  
it will snow

it will snow and snow and snow  
because  
what you have done is beyond human understanding  
there is no bottom to it  
the human species is itself  
a dark abyss  
when it can take a girl  
and end her life like this.

[her throat is cut]

EXECUTIONER

Why is the sky suddenly overcast?

[And, as the girl sinks slowly to the ground,  
the chorus sings:

I love the weather  
any kind at all  
I like the winter  
I like the fall  
I like the heat  
I like the cold  
I like the frost  
I like the dew  
I like the rain  
I like the hail

[And it begins to snow.

Music for a while.

The widow joins the chorus in singing.]

WIDOW

I like the fog  
I like the snow  
I like the mist  
I like the ice

[And then the girl rises from the ground,  
takes the executioner's knife,  
and she takes revenge  
deliberately  
one by one  
first the boy  
then the judge  
as the widow continues to sing,  
joined now by the chorus:

#### WIDOW & CHORUS

I like the sunshine  
I like the leaves  
I like the mountains  
I like the trees  
I like the sky  
I like the dirt  
I like the grass  
I like the worms  
I like the mold  
I like the silt

[And, then,  
the girl murders the widow,

and,  
as that last murder is completed,  
and the girl sinks again to the ground,  
the chorus is left alone to sing:

I like the mud  
I like the wind  
I like the breeze  
I like the wet  
I like the hills  
I like the clay  
I like the streams  
I like the frogs  
I like the storms

I like the buzzards  
I like the blizzards  
I like the cows  
I like the billboards  
I like the valleys  
I like the throughways  
I like the overpasses  
I like the underpasses  
I like the trolleys  
I like the planes  
I like the subways  
I like the stores  
I like the dresses  
I like the shoes  
I like the lipstick  
I like the children  
I like the songs  
I like the statues  
I like the theatre  
I like the cars  
I like the cigarettes  
I like the park  
I like the pits  
I like the cliffs  
I like the dark  
I like the clouds  
I like the talk  
I like the babies  
I like the girls  
I like the mothers  
I like the toys  
I like the outdoors  
that's how it is  
I like the holidays  
and the weekends  
I like Thanksgiving  
and Veterans' Day  
I like the wind  
I like the buses



I like the buildings  
I like the windows  
I like the doors  
I like the eaves  
I like the swaying of the trees  
I like the garbage  
I like the trucks  
I like the rocks  
I like the stuff you see when you walk down the street anywhere you are because  
wherever it is and whatever you see the main thing is you can see you are alive  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
  
another day  
  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day  
another day

It continues to snow.

The End.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

*Utopia Parkway* is inspired by a Chinese story recorded in the History of Han, and in the Records of Spirits of the fourth century, dramatized by Kuan Han-ch'ing in the thirteenth century as Injustice to Tou-O.

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